

Memoirs of Himself.

order of time, and reduce your recollections, from the earliest period to the present, into as simple a statement and explanation as you can, of your feelings, opinions, and habits, and of the principal circumstances through each stage that have influenced them, till they have become at last what they now are.

Whatever tendencies nature may justly be deemed to have imparted in the first instance, you would probably find the greater part of the moral constitution of your being composed of the contributions of many years and events, consolidated by degrees, into what we call character; and by investigating the progress of the accumulation, you would be assisted to judge more clearly how far the materials are valuable, the mixture gongniflus, and the whole conformation worthy to remain unaltered. With respect to any friend who greatly interests us, we have a curiosity to obtain an accurate account of the past train of his life and feelings ; and whatever other reasons there may be for such a wish, it partly springs from a consciousness how much this retrospective knowledge would assist to complete our estimate of that friend; but our estimate of ourselves is of more serious consequence.

The elapsed periods of life acquire importance too from the prospect of its continuance. The smallest thing rises into consequence when regarded as the commencement of what has advanced, or is advancing, into magnificence. The first rude settlement of Romulus would have been an insignificant circumstance, and might justly have sunk into oblivion, if Rome had not at length commanded the world. The little rill near the source of one of the great American ⁴ rivers is an interesting object to the traveller, who is apprised, < as he steps across it, or walks a few miles along its "Bank, that this is the stream which runs so far, and which gradually swells into so vast a flood. So, while I anticipate the endless progress of life, and wonder through what unknown scenes it is to take its course, its past years lose that character of vanity which would seem to belong to a train of fleeting, perishing moments, and I see them assuming the dignity of a commencing eternity. In them I have *begun* to be that conscious existence which I *am* to be through endless duration; and I feel a strange emotion of curiosity about this little life, in which I am setting out on such a progress ;